

Brands, vintages, case shapes, complications – watch collectors are driven by a number of things, but almost without exception, they involve the watches in their entirety. Chronograph collectors, perhaps uniquely, are inspired by one other value, in addition to obvious susceptibility to the above: they're obsessed by movements. **Ken Kessler**

The Chronograph Collection

"Hold on a sec," you might be thinking. "All watch collecting involves the movements." And that's true up to a point, but it's rarely the prime motivation for wanting a specific watch. If, for example, you love diving watches, you might desire a Blancpain Fifty Fathoms, a Rolex Submariner, maybe a Doxa, and so on. But which movement resides inside is rarely the impetus for your lust: it's the watch as a whole that you covet. The Fifty Fathoms hosted so many dial variations that Blancpain was able to exhibit a couple of hundred models in Paris with few visual duplicates. But nobody was concerned with the innards.

Chronographs differ from other watches in that the movements are inseparable from and determine the fundamental

desirability of the models. My awareness of this was born early in my collecting days. I noticed huge price disparities between seemingly identical models, especially for chronographs such as Universal Geneve's assorted Compaxes, Longines chronographs from the 1950s, French Military Type XXs – Breguet vs Dodane, for example – and a number of Heuers. The most pronounced example of the difference a movement could make was not, however, a chronograph, but a time-only watch: compare the values of two similar Panerai's, one with a Rolex movement and the other with an Angelus, and you'll see how wide the gap can be.

There was, however, no consistency as far as the ultimate desirability of a watch with a specific movement was concerned,

Below. A pre-moon Speedmaster Professional model powered by the Lemania caliber 321, which was replaced in 1968 by the slightly cheaper calibre 861 (also Lemania). Visually, the 1968 change consisted of a new bracelet and a printed Omega logo on the dial instead of a metal applied Omega logo.



because the movement would invariably prove secondary to the name on the dial, however covetable the movement might be. Confused? So was I, when wiser, more experienced collectors waxed lyrical about the movements in even seemingly mundane watches.

Inside out

In the world of chronograph collecting, movements including the earliest Zenith El Primeros, the Valjoux 72, certain Lemania's, the Longines 30CH, a Landeron or two, certain Excelsior Parks, the odd Movado and others excite collectors as much as the watches in which they can be found. Many of these movements powered a number of chronographs from various manufacturers, hence the seeming confusion. Patek Philippe, Vacheron Constantin, Rolex and other





Above. Commander of Apollo 8, Frank Borman's Speedmaster. This ST 105.012 model (calibre 321) came off the production line on 15 September 1967. Tested between 23 January and 5 December 1968, the watch is pictured here on its approval form. **Below.** The 1970s Heuer Bundeswehr chronograph made for the German military is sought after by collectors of vintage chronographs and military watches.



Above. A 1947 Longines equipped with a Calibre 30 CH movement – a mechanical manual winding chronograph movement developed following a lengthy phase of research and modification. **Below.** A one-of-a-kind, adapted Valjoux 72 movement as used by Master Watchmaker Peter Roberts in the one-off, 5-hand chronograph that was his graduation project from WOSTEP in 1971.



Above. The original Breguet Type XX was a French military chronograph of the 1950s. The wristwatches were state property and only issued to pilots on missions from 1954 to about 1960 (when it was succeeded by the Type 21). **Below.** The Valjoux 7754 (a 7750 variation with date) automatic chrono movement was modified with peerless execution before being used in the Bremont ALT1-Z.



prestigious brands bought movements from outside suppliers, but so did the affordable brands. Thus the names either enhanced the value of the movements, or detracted from them in equal proportion.

If, for example, you were to take three disparate watches fitted with the same movement, you would find a wide spread of second-hand values. The highly coveted Valjoux 72 is so desirable that collectors have cannibalised 'lesser' chronographs fitted with this movement, in order to provide parts for more lofty watches. Imagine, then, three watches fitted with Valjoux 72s: the Universal-Geneve Space Compax, the Glycine Airman SST and the manual-winding Rolex Cosmograph. Even the most cursory checking of auction results or eBay would



reveal that the latter carries a price tag of 10-20 times greater than that of either the Universal or the Glycine.

What this has created is an unusual bifurcation amongst chronograph enthusiasts, however much they are driven by the calibres in question. Why should a Rolex Cosmograph command logarithmically more than a Space Compax or Heuer Carrera or an Enicar Jet-Graph? Simple: there are more Rolex collectors than there are chronograph-specific or Valjoux-specific collectors. The supply versus demand issue will always create such price strata.

Another example is a specific Lemania movement that can be found in the Omega Speedmaster Professional as well as in certain



Patek Philippe; again, the value is 10 times greater for the latter. That same movement powered the pre-Richemont Panerai Mare Nostrum; its price in this Italian watch falls somewhere in between a Speedmaster Professional and a Patek Philippe. But lest you think that the disparities involve only the name on the dial, note that any company of the repute of Patek Philippe or Rolex would not simply re-house a raw movement from an outside supplier. So the name on the dial did mean something 'extra', even though the movements were essentially the same.

Bagging a bargain

If you're merely looking for a Valjoux 72 or similar prestige movement, you needn't spend a fortune because there are numerous undistinguished makes that happened to

The Chronograph Collection



Above. At Basel 2011, Glycine unveiled the Airman SST Chronograph, based on the legendary original model, which was launched in 1968. **Below.** Rare version of 1960s Breitling Navitimer with AOPA logo instead of Breitling.

Below. Eberhard created an instantly recognizable chrono by customising the sub-dial layout.

Below. The Victorinox AirBoss Mach VI incorporating Valjoux 7750 movement.



use the 72 or other fine calibres. Just as the current and most popular chronograph movement of them all, the Valjoux 7750, can be found in everything from sub-£1000 Hamiltons to five-figure haute horlogerie offerings, so, too, are vintage movements available from a variety of makers.

While Zenith circa 2011 needs every El Primero movement it can make, this calibre used to be offered to other houses, including a few decades powering Rolex Daytonas. It also served as the basis for Parmigiani Fleurier's first chronographs. Depending on the year and model Heuer you've just discovered, it might bear a Landeron, Lemania or Valjoux movement, or – after 1969 – the automatic Calibre 11 co-created with Hamilton, Breitling and Dubois Depraz. This use of bought-in calibres is no reflection on the skills of the manufacturer. Chronograph ebauches are difficult to produce and, as

mentioned above, the better houses would modify the movements and apply exquisite levels of finissage to distinguish between the base calibre and one that would justify housing in a case and bearing a dial from Audemars, Vacheron, Patek, Rolex and the like. Open any vintage chronograph, and you might find a movement from Piguet, from Venus, from Movado. How it's used, finished and adjusted is the difference between one application and another.

This was communicated to me a few years ago while on vacation in Switzerland, in the company of a friend who happens to be a watchmaker. While our wives were shopping elsewhere, we happened upon a magnificent vintage watch store and were quickly in conversation with the proprietor. Upon learning that my friend was a seasoned Rolex restorer, he immediately produced a sublime 1960s Cosmograph, in need of a single part

that would mean the difference between a sale of £10,000 or £25,000.

He held up a Valjoux 72 movement, in perfect order. But it lacked that single part not available on the kind of 72 he could easily scavenge from a lesser watch. Unfortunately, a previous repairer had replaced the Rolex-finished bridge with one that was unadorned. To the sort of fastidious collector able to afford a Cosmograph, it was a deal breaker.

Playing along

Before one even arrives at the point where a specific chronograph movement emerges as a personal favourite, the appeal of chronographs per se can be dispatched with ease. Simply put, and making no apologies for the boys' toys component of chronographs, watch enthusiasts love chronographs because they're the most interactive of watches, inviting hands-on



Above. Panerai's 2010 behemoth – the 52mm Mare Nostrum powered by the hand-wound mechanical, exclusive Panerai OP XXV calibre movement. **Below.** 1950s Lemania chronograph that was issued to Royal Navy pilots.



Above. A 1965 Lemonia that differs from 1950s version by the protective shoulders on either side of crown and button. **Below.** Short lived automatic Omega Dynamic chronograph produced between 1999 and 2000 and still considered to be an ultimate bargain.



Above. The Top Time was Breitling's answer to the Heuer Carrera and was once seen in a James Bond movie. **Below.** A Universal Geneve Space Compax from the early-1970s housing the Valjoux 72 movement.



activity. Most watches, regardless of their added functions, do not encourage 'fiddling about'. You set a perpetual calendar or a GMT and then leave it alone. A minute repeater is activated primarily for showing off. A tourbillon is a movement type, not a function. But a chronograph provides a stopwatch operation, useful for timing events and their segments.

Admittedly, few of us genuinely need the split-second timing of a cutting-edge chronograph, but the same could be said about the 300m-plus water-resistance of diving watches. We buy them because we like them and perhaps, on occasion, we might actually need to access their capabilities beyond mere timekeeping. By sheer force of habit, I always start my chronograph during take-off if I'm wearing one on a flight. I also use mine to cook perfect soft- or hard-boiled eggs and to

time slow-cooked baked beans, which necessitates a 12-hour counter. And I've used them to time car races, recording sessions and other events.

Regardless of the brand or, indeed, the movement that earns your allegiance, within the world of chronograph collecting there are other considerations that will help you to narrow down the choices. Chronographs have been fitted with other complications, especially post-1969, which saw the arrival of the self-winding chronograph. Many recent models now qualify as 'Grand Complications' thanks to the presence of triple or perpetual calendars, minute repeaters, GMT functions and other features. Vintage models with such extras, however, are extremely rare, so the variations on older watches tend to be more chronograph-centric.

Individual style

Among the distinguishing features found

in older models are assorted button, counter and dial layouts. Single- or two-button chronographs, or mono-pushers in which the stop/start button is concentric with the crown, might determine a field of collecting, as would models with one, two, three or even four sub-dials. Sub-dial variants include specialised scales, such as 45-minute counters. The more complex Universal-Geneve models, like the Tri-Compax and the Dato-Compax, used four sub-dials to provide the expected 60-seconds/30-minutes/12-hours counters, with the fourth dial for either date, moonphase or both. Eberhard created its own iconic chronograph by arranging its four sub-dials in a row.

Various applications were addressed simply by highlighting specific intervals on the subsidiary dials. For maritime use, the dials could indicate the tides, as with Heuer's Mareograph, or for indicating the staggered



The
Chronograph
Collection



Above. A Wittnauer Professional from the late 1950s/early 1960s with Landeron movement.



Above and right. An early incarnation of the El Primero and movement.

start times for yacht racing. Indicative of the era in which a chronograph was developed were minute counters highlighted for 3- and 5-minute periods, extremely useful during the years when long-distance phone calls cost a small fortune.

In addition to the various functions that could be indicated by the sub-dials, chronograph designers also used the outer chapter rings to serve different purposes. The most famous chronographs of all – Rolex's Daytona and Omega's Speedmaster Professional – calibrated their outer rings as tachymeters, able to indicate speed when the chronograph is started and stopped while traversing roads with distance markers.

Other watches had their outer dials calibrated as pulse meters, a useful feature for doctors.

Technical variations that veer away from the basic start/stop/reset recipe added further appeal to chronographs. The flyback function, which enables the user to commence the timing of a new interval without re-setting the hand and then restarting it manually, was developed by Breitling and is now found in costly models such as Breguet's Type XXI and Chronoswiss' Timemaster Flyback. But Longines, Omega and others had simplified versions without subsidiary counters, which effectively used the main seconds hand as the chronograph hand, enabling the timing of events under one minute.

For sheer value-for-money, thanks to high survival rates, a 1960s Omega Chronostop is a good place to start if you fancy its 'semi-flyback' operation. And if you want a brand-

new take on this, then head straight to your Zenith dealer for the current and utterly sublime Retrotimer.

Despite the breathtaking accuracy of electronic stopwatches and even phone apps, the chronograph continues to seduce watch collectors. At the pinnacle of chronograph lust – other complications notwithstanding – is the split-second chronograph, which allows for the partial timing of two concurrent events. Enthusiasts favour column wheel designs over cam systems, while recently, companies including TAG-Heuer, Montblanc and Breitling have featured counters with fix markers, the discs themselves rotating to show elapsed times instead of a small moving hand doing the indicating. Patek Philippe and Rolex have had in-house

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chronograph calibres since the turn of the century. Breitling recently launched an all-new, in-house chronograph movement, Bremont's is housed in a Faraday cage to render it immune to magnetism. As of last year, Zenith can offer a chronograph accurate to 1/10th of a second, while TAG Heuer showed a prototype in Baselworld 2011 that qualifies as the first-ever mechanical chronograph to mark 1/1000th of a second (see this issue's News pages). But there must be something special about modern chronographs' elderly predecessors: Baselworld 2011 also saw the return of the Heuer Monza, the Breitling Transocean and the Glycine SST... as near-perfect replicas.

Ten Most Wanted Vintage Chronographs

- Breguet Type XX first series
- Breitling Navitimer circa 1960-1965
- Breitling Top-Time
- Heuer 1970s Bundeswehr German Military
- Watch, a.k.a. '3H'
- Lemania Royal Navy issue 1950s
- Omega Speedmaster Professional pre-1968
- Panerai Mare Nostrum, 1990s
- Patek Philippe Ref 1463
- Rolex Zerograph
- Universal-Geneve Space Compax

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